

Irula language

Irula is a Dravidian language spoken by the Irulas who inhabit the area of the Nilgiri mountains, in the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, India.^[3] It is written in the Tamil script.

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Origins

The language was first described and classified by indologist Kamil Zvelebil, who in 1955 showed that the Irula language is an independent Southern Dravidian language that is akin to Tamil, particularly Old Tamil, with some Kannada-like features. Before that, it was traditionally denied or put to doubt, and Irula was described as a crude or corrupt mixture of Tamil and Kannada.

According to a tentative hypothesis by Kamil Zvelebil, a pre-Dravidian Melanid population that forms the bulk of the Irulas anthropologically began to speak an ancient pre- or proto-Tamil dialect, which was superimposed almost totally on their native (pre-Dravidian) speech. That then became the basis of the language, which must have subsequently been in close contact with the other tribal languages of the Nilgiri area as well as with the large surrounding languages such as Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam.

Phonology

The tables present the vowel^[4] and the consonant^{[5][6]} phonemes of Irula.

Vowels

Irula	
இருளா	
Native to	India
Region	Nilgiri Mountains
Ethnicity	Irula
Native speakers	11,870 (2011 census) ^[1] <div>Census conflates some speakers with Tamil</div>
Language family	<div>Dravidian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southern Dravidian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil–Kannada<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil–Kodagu<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil–Malayalam<ul style="list-style-type: none">Irula</div>
Writing system	Tamil script
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	iru
Glottolog	irul1243 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/irul1243) ^[2]

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i i:		u u:
Mid	e e:		o o:
Open		a a:	

All vowels are centralized by certain neighbouring consonants. They are then transcribed [i̠ e̠ ä̠ ö̠ ü̠], etc., but they may be closer to [ɪ ɘ æ ɜ ʊ].

Consonants

Phonemes marked with an asterisk appear only in Zvelebil (2001, p. 157).

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar
Nasal	m		n	ɳ		ŋ
Stop/Affricate	p b	t̪ d̪	t* d*	ʈ ɖ	tʃ dʒ	k g
Fricative	v		s			
Approximant (Lateral)			l	j*	j	
Rhotic		ɽ	ɻ			

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2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Irula of the Nilgiri" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/irul1243>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Perialwar (1979), p. 1.
4. Perialwar (1979), p. 55.
5. Perialwar (1979), p. 57.
6. Zvelebil (2001), p. 157.

Sources

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Further reading

- Zvelebil, Kamil (1973), *The Irula language, Volumes 1-3* (https://books.google.com/books?id=6GfRAAAAMAAJ&q=coimbatore+kovan&dq=coimbatore+kovan&hl=en&ei=ID0PTK2xHM_0_Ab)

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